

## Karnataka's Industry and Technology Leaders Must Speak Out on Farming Displacement and Land Conflicts

— An Open Letter from Scholars, Scientists, and Public-Policy Experts

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2025

*Dear Stewards of Industry and Technology in Karnataka,*

We are sure you are aware that on **25-26 June 2025**, farmers from **13 villages in Devanahalli taluk**, just north of Bengaluru's airport, marked **1,178 consecutive days of protest** against the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board's (KIADB) plan to acquire **1,777 acres of fertile farmland** for a proposed **High-Tech Defence and Aerospace Park**. Although the State has since agreed to withdraw **495 acres**, village leaders continue to demand that **all remaining land be denotified**, rejecting what they view as a **"divide-and-rule"** tactic and warning of renewed agitation if their concerns are not addressed.

A recent *Deccan Herald* editorial-page report traced this resistance to **deep generational ties to the land** and a growing distrust of top-down, non-consultative development. One protester summed it up during the June rally: **"We are not against development, but let it not come by uprooting those who have fed this nation for generations."** (deccanherald.com). Residents have clearly expressed their desire to continue farming and to remain in the land that has sustained their lives and livelihoods for generations.

Their doubts about **"fair and timely"** compensation are grounded in history. Farmers are not only concerned about the loss of livelihood; they are also deeply skeptical of government promises—shaped by past experience in the region. For many, the fear is not just displacement but being **forgotten once the land is taken**. In this context, assurances ring hollow and confidence in the system remains low.

This protest—both local and symbolic—raises urgent questions about the direction of Karnataka's development strategy. It exposes a *widening fault line between industrial expansion and the livelihoods* of those who sustain the state's agrarian base.

It is important to remember that the fertile lands around Devanahalli are a lifeline for **Bengaluru's food and nutrition security**. Even during the harshest phases of the COVID-19 lockdown, these farmers provided a steady flow of fruits, vegetables, milk, and other essentials to the city. Together, the surrounding districts produce an estimated **7–8 million tonnes** of horticultural crops annually, while local dairies deliver **over 10 million litres of milk daily** to Bengaluru's Nandini/Mother Dairy network—roughly *one kilogram of fresh produce and nearly a litre of milk per person each day*.

Karnataka's economic progress requires a **balanced approach**—one that values both industrial growth and agrarian livelihoods. Undermining the rural and farming base in the name of “development” is like biting the hand that feeds. *You can't build towers on empty stomachs*—and no vision of progress can endure if it comes at the cost of those who feed us.

### **Silence Must Not Become Complicity**

The **legitimacy of this land acquisition is deeply questionable**. Under the *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013*, it is mandatory to obtain the **informed consent of at least 80 %** of affected landowners before acquiring land for private or public-private projects. Yet KIADB's own 2022 survey showed that *over 80 % of farmers are unwilling to part with their land*.

Moreover, 163 of the affected farmers belong to **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**. Much of this land was originally granted under land-reform schemes and cannot be acquired or transferred without special permission and safeguards. Ignoring these protections risks violating both **constitutional rights** and **social-justice** laws.

KIADB already holds significant **surplus, unutilised land** across Karnataka that could accommodate such industrial ventures. The persistent focus on acquiring fertile farmland in Devanahalli, despite these alternatives, raises serious concerns about opaque land transactions and *possible collusion between speculative interests and elements within the ruling establishment*.

An earlier **CAG Performance Audit Report** (No. 8 of 2017) exposed **serious irregularities** in KIADB's land acquisition and allotment processes—ranging from missing annual plans and ignored environmental safeguards to undue benefits for select allottees. With such a record, there is little assurance that the current acquisition is fair, transparent, or truly in the public interest.

We firmly believe that you are not only key stakeholders in Karnataka's growth, but also **custodians of public trust and societal influence**. As architects of the state's industrial future, your leadership carries immense weight—not just in driving markets, but in defining the kind of society we build. Today, your responsibility extends beyond economic success to ethical leadership and the pursuit of inclusive development. *In this moment, silence is not neutrality—it is impact.*

Now is the time to speak—not only for legality and transparency, but for a vision of development that is **just, inclusive, and sustainable**. Karnataka cannot afford a model of progress that marginalises those who feed the state and sustain its cities.

### **Solidarity Is Growing—Will You Join?**

In support of the Devanahalli farmers, **Samyukta Horata**—a coalition of farmers' and Dalit organisations, workers' unions, women's groups, and youth platforms—has launched a **dharna at Freedom Park in Bengaluru**. This collective action expresses solidarity and gratitude to the *Annadatas* (food providers) from diverse segments of society. On **29 June**, hundreds of school-children from the region joined the dharna, lending their voices in a powerful show of support.

We urge you—**pillars of Karnataka's economy**—to recognise this moment and stand with the farmers of Devanahalli. Let your voice strengthen the movement toward a fairer, more balanced development paradigm. Growth must not erase those who sustain it. ***Your leadership matters—let it stand for conscience, equity, and a just future.*** We also ask that you **protect food security** by opposing the diversion of fertile arable land to industrial use and by insisting that industrial corridors be confined to **non-arable land unfit for farming**.

We hope you will convey your concerns to the government at the earliest—seeking a thorough **review of the Devanahalli acquisition** and supporting a broader **public dialogue** on Karnataka's land-acquisition policy.

With **Chief Minister Siddaramaiah** convening a meeting of farmer representatives and stakeholders on **4 July**, we remain hopeful that this appeal will receive your **principled and timely response**.

**Sincerely,**

*(Signed on behalf of all endorsing scholars, scientists, and public-policy experts)*



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**Cc — For kind information and necessary consideration:**

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2. **Shri M. B. Patil**, Hon'ble Minister for Large & Medium Industries,  
Government of Karnataka
3. **Chief Secretary**, Government of Karnataka
4. **Principal Secretary**, Department of Industries and Commerce,  
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### Endorsed by Prominent Scholars, Scientists, and Public-Policy Experts:

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